

## Joe Sobran (1946-2010): Relegated Champion

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"Revisionism" is somewhat of a misnomer—or is incomplete in its implications, at any rate. The term denotes a process of correction through change—in this case, of the historical record. But in most of the cases published in this journal, it implies much more. It implies a correction of popular error, a sailing against the wind of Napoleon's acid and all-too-true definition of history as "Lies agreed upon." By definition, the content of revisionism is opposed not only by popular belief, but by power elites whose dominance and ease depend upon the continuance of the popular belief. At no risk of usurping the existing terminology, I'll submit "Retrospective dissent" as a better description.

This means, in turn, that every revisionist who publishes his revision under his own name becomes, in doing so, a martyr. Rarely, nowadays, does it seem to cost the revisionist's physical life, but it often costs not only career and reputation, but even to some extent his health, perhaps even his marriage or familial relations.

Some revisionists, perhaps the more fortunate, plunge into the tempest of revisionism with seemingly little to lose. Generally of the younger sort, these stalwarts offer up on the altar of revisionism only brilliant careers still unborn, domestic bliss still only within their dreams. Others experience the opening of their eyes only as wisdom unfolds with age. These, talented and rigorously honest souls to a man (and woman), always—by my definition—have respected professional reputations, devoted families and/or circles of friends, in some cases wide public followings, even high incomes and perhaps the beginnings of wealth. And these, they consign, if not willingly, then still knowingly, to smoke in the flames that burn eternally, like those of Hell, to consume those who would defy the status quo in the defense of truth.

Such a one was Michael Joseph Sobran, in 1991 arguably the best writer in the stable of brilliant writers assembled by William F. Buckley to fill the pages of his *National Review* magazine with the most-glittering, high-impact, and influential prose ever to be associated with the word "conservative." And it was around 1991, with the launching of the First Gulf War, that Joe Sobran began his long, tortuous descent from the pinnacle of Conservative approbation, influence, income, and security he had attained under the banner of the *National Review* and its charismatic founder and leader, William F. Buckley. Sobran set out on this course by opposing the First Gulf War and sealed his fate by pointing out that the interests and influence of Israel were critical in propelling the US along the path to this and subsequent wars.

Buckley was not the cause of Joe Sobran's undoing—he was the agent of it. Sobran's undoing was designed and compelled by the agents of Israel, chiefly *New Republic* Editor Norman Podhoretz and his wife Midge Decter. These dropped on Sobran the atomic bomb of Zionist opprobrium: they said he was anti-Semitic. Worse, they eventually bullied Buckley into confirming their scurrilous charge.

Joe Sobran would have none of it. Besides holding to his initial position without the merest hint of cavil or mitigation, he fired back at his attackers with devastating revelations of their warmongering, imperial, genocidal motivations. Buckley won the fight the only way he could: he fired Sobran in 1993.

As Sobran inquired further into Israeli atrocities and the historical/moral/biblical claims made by Israel's apologists to somehow expiate these atrocities, his attention was drawn to the tortured history of the

"Holocaust" of 1933-1945. He eventually found sympathy with, and from, the Institute for Historical Review and its director, Historian Mark Weber. A writer (and eloquent speaker, as Sobran was) must have an audience. Seldom is a writer's audience composed entirely of people who are as glittering, glamorous, wealthy, stylish, or admired as one might possibly wish. And when a purveyor of thoughts and ideas such as Sobran finds audiences that welcome him, the purveyor naturally and instinctively inflects his milieu in the direction of their interests. Even Elie Wiesel began to write in French when the Yiddish vein he had been mining petered out.

Thus it was that, after his split with the *National Review*, Joe Sobran bestowed progressively more of his genius on two worthy recipients: Catholicism, and opposing the hijacking of American hearts and minds by Zionists.

Where the two of these intersected most-trenchantly, was hatred.

Joe Sobran was the nemesis of hatred. In his columns, he wrestled this devil *mano a mano*, and he beat it every time. Perhaps the profane charges of anti-Semitism made him take Old Scratch on so frontally and so devastatingly. Consider the wisdom displayed in a quip he made in his section of William F. Buckley's *In Search of Anti-Semitism*, the book in which Buckley's abandonment of the last pretense of conservative idealism became finally and indisputably visible to all: "The term anti-Semite used to refer to a person who hates Jews. Today, an anti-Semite is a person who is hated by Jews."

Like Lord Acton and Murray Rothbard, Joe Sobran grew more radical as he got older. He was, in fact, a devoted follower of Murray Rothbard, eventually pronouncing himself a "reluctant anarchist." Rothbard may even have influenced Sobran's seminal thinking about anti-Semitism and hatred. The Profile of Murray Rothbard in the Fall 2010 issue of *Inconvenient History* included a link to his 1990 essay, "Pat Buchanan and the Menace of Anti-anti-Semitism." Buchanan, of course, was a victim of Buckley concurrently with Sobran, and Buckley figures into Rothbard's essay extensively.

Sobran's own magnum opus on the subject was "The Uses of Hate," (<http://tinyurl.com/2458jxd>) in which he delivered some startling insights on the subject of hatred—particularly the hatred of groups that so obsesses a certain kind of pundit on such notions. "Despite all the rhetoric of bigotry that assails us these days, it just isn't that easy to hate indiscriminately. In fact such hatred seems unnatural — or, if you prefer, idiosyncratic." He continues to remind us of what we know perfectly well—despite the illusory pronouncements of the aforementioned pundits—that hatred is an emotion felt against specific, known (or perhaps not-well-understood) persons, and not against groups of persons with whom the would-be hater is not personally acquainted. Of course, it is not only possible, but frequently attempted, to express, even to encourage, hatred of just such persons-unknown, but such attitudes are at best abstractions, and more-often sheer incitements, to which the human soul ultimately cannot faithfully attach itself. Even Hitler famously arranged for the unmolested emigration of the Jewish doctor who had attended him and his mother in Linz, Austria—the same doctor who characterized the juvenile Adolf as in all ways respectful, polite, and devoted to his mother in a way most-difficult to reconcile with the images subsequently disseminated of the soulless monster Adolf Hitler.

Joe Sobran—like the rest of us continually inundated by incitements to hatred perversely clothed in the trappings of opposition to just such hatred—saw through the entire travesty, and delivered to those of us who would receive it these critical insights. For this, the intellectual powers that be excoriated him mercilessly.

And such are those powers, to the everlasting detriment not only of Joe Sobran, but of you, and me, and of peace and brotherhood quite as well. Joe Sobran resisted them—eloquently, resolutely, politely, and with unassailable recourse, time and again, to fact and reason. And he did so with indomitable courage and heedlessness to his own welfare.

In doing this, his life and works pose a standard to each of us. To bear witness, yes. To do so eloquently, loudly—even, as it may be, offensively to many, yes. To do so resolutely and fearlessly, yes. But above all, to do so confident in the truth and virtue of what we do, and ultimately, in the irresistible need for it to be done.

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